

Message Text

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION CHALLENGES BAN ON NAP

REF: A. LAHORE 175 (NOTAL)

B. ISLAMABAD 1446

SUMMARY: OPPOSITION LEADERS, COMPRISING UDF (MINUS, OF COURSE, NAP) AND TIP, MET IN LAHORE FEBRUARY 17 AND UNIFORMLY CONDEMNED ARREST OF NAP LEADERS, BAN ON NAP AND IMPOSITION OF GOVERNOR'S RULE IN NWFP. PML AND JI SPOKESMAN DECLARED THAT OPPOSITION WOULD BOYCOTT GOVERNMENT'S INTENDED REFERENCE OF NAP CASE TO SUPREME COURT UNLESS PARTY'S LEADERS WERE RELEASED FROM DETENTION AND GIVEN OPPORTUNITY TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. SUCH STATEMENTS DREW SHARP REJOINDER FROM GOP MINISTER PIRZADA WHO CALLED OPPOSITION THREATS "SUBVERSION OF CONSTITUTION." MEANWHILE, GOP INTERIOR MINISTER QAIYUM CURRENTLY VISITING LAHORE AREA, CONTINUES TO ATTACH NAP AND DEFEND GOVERNMENT'S SUPPRESSIVE ACTIONS. SMALL OPPOSITION HAS BEGUN BOYCOTT OF PUNJAB PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY SESSION AND HAS CHARGED THAT CURRENT BAN ON PUBLIC MEETINGS SEEMS TO APPLY ONLY TO OPPOSITION, NOT TO PPP-SPONSORED DEMONSTRATIONS PRO-

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TESTING ASSASSINATION OF SHERPAO. QAIYUM HAS NOW ANNOUNCED

THAT NAP CASE WILL BE FORMALLY PRESENTED TO SUPREME COURT FEBRUARY 24, AND UDF LAWYERS HAVE FILED HABEAS CORPUS PETITION WITH LAHORE COURT CHALLENGING WALI KAHN'S DETENTION. END SUMMARY.

1. SEVERAL TOP OPPOSITION LEADERS HELD INDOOR "PUBLIC" MEETING AT JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI OFFICE IN LAHORE FEBRUARY 17, DURING WHICH REPRESENTATIVES OF UDF PARTIES (OTHER THAN PROSCRIBED NAP) PLUS TEHRIK-I-ISTIQLAL (TIP) CONDEMNED ARREST OF NAP LEADERS, BAN OF THAT PARTY AND IMPOSITION OF GOVERNOR'S RULE IN NWFP. PROMINENT PARTICIPANTS WERE: ACTING JI AMIR MAULANA JAN MOHAMMAD ABBASSI, PML GENERAL SECRETARY MOHAMMAD QASIM, CML MNA CHAUDHRI ZAHUR ILAHI, TIP MNA MAHMUD ALI KASURI, JUI SECRETARY GENERAL MAULANA MUFTI MAHMOOD, AND PJP PRESIDENT NAWABZADA NASRULLAH KAHN.

2. ACCORDING TO DETAILED VERNACULAR PRESS ACCOUNTS FEBRUARY 18 (NOT COVERED IN CONTROLLED ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPERS), TWO OR THREE OPPOSITION LEADERS, INCLUDING QASIM OF PML AND PROFESSOR GHAFOR AHMAD OF JI, DECLARED THAT UNLESS NAP LEADERS WERE RELEASED FROM DETENTION AND ALLOWED TO DEFEND THEMSELVES, USF WOULD "BOYCOTT" ANY GOP REFERENCE TO SUPREME COURT OF ITS BAN ON NAP. ALTHOUGH IT DID NOT CARRY ORIGINAL STATEMENTS, PAKISTAN TIMES FEBRUARY 19 REPORTED REJOINDER BY GOP EDUCATION MINISTER PIRZADA FROM QUETTA CLAIMING THAT GHAFOR HAD ASSERTED THAT OPPOSITION WOULD NOT ACCEPT SUPREME COURT DECISION IN NAP CASE. PIRZADA REPORTEDLY CHARGED THAT SUCH ATTITUDE WOULD CONSTITUTE "SUBVERSION OF THE CONSTITUTION" AND THREATENED LEGAL ACTION AGAINST ANYONE WHO REFUSED TO ACCEPT SUPREME COURT DECISION.

3. OPPOSITION VERNACULARS FEBRUARY 20 CARRIED RIPOSTE BY CHAUDHRI ZAHUR ILAHI DENYING THAT OPPOSITION HAD THREATENED NOT TO ACCEPT SUPREME COURT COURT VERDICT. HE CHARGED GOP HOME MINISTER QAIYUM KHAN WITH TRYING TO CREATE IMPRESSION THAT SUPREME COURT WOULD DECIDE IN FAVOR OF GOVERNMENT, WHICH, HE COUNTERCHARGED, AMOUNTED TO "CONTEMPT OF COURT."

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4. GHAFOR AND OTHER OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE JOINED ILAHI IN CRITICIZING QAIYUM KHAN AND PIRZADA FOR PREJUDGING CASE BY CALLING NAP "UNLAWFUL" PARTY AND BY DECLARING THAT IT HAD BEEN "UPROOTED." ILAHI ARGUED THAT PIRZADA HAD COMPOUNDED ERROR IN THREATENING LEGAL ACTION AGAINST ANYONE WHO DID NOT ACCEPT SUPREME COURT VERDICT IN CASE. OPPOSITIONISTS CONTEND THAT PIRZADA'S STATEMENTS TO PRESS SUGGEST HE ALREADY KNOWS

OUTCOME OF CASE, THUS IMPLYING GOP PRESSURE ON SUPREME COURT. THEY ALSO ACCUSE GOP OF STRIVING TO WIPE OUT OPPOSITION ENTIRELY.

5. PUNJAB PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY (PA) OPPOSITION MEMBERS MET IN LAHORE FEBRUARY 13 AND DECIDED TO BOYCOTT CURRENT SESSION BEGINNING FOLLOWING DAY. DECISION WAS ANNOUNCED IN PA FEBRUARY 14 BY LEADER AND OPPOSITION MEMBERS THEREUPON WALKED OUT. HOWEVER, BEFORE BOYCOTT BEGAN, TIP MPA MOVED ADJOURNMENT MOTION IN HOUSE CHARGING THAT CURRENT BAN ON PUBLIC MEETINGS IN FORCE IN MOST G F PUNJAB SEEMS TO APPLY ONLY TO OPPOSITION, SINCE VARIOUS PPP-SPONSORED DEMONSTRATIONS TO PROTEST ASSASSINATION OF SHERPAO HAVE BEEN HELD WITHOUT POLICE INTERVENTION. PA SPEAKER ADMITTED MOTION, BUT IT WAS SOUNDLY DEFEATED BY GOVERNMENT.

6. ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PRESS FEBRUARY 19, HOME MINISTER QAIYUM TOLD PUBLIC MEETING AT GUJRAT FEBRUARY 18 THAT GOP CASE CONCERNING BAN ON NAP WOULD BE PRESENTED SUPREME COURT FORMALLY FEBRUARY 24. LATER SAME DAY, HE TOLD PML PARTY WORKERS IN LAHORE THAT NAP LEADERS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO CONTEST THE BAN "DESPITE FACT THAT THE DEFUNCT NAP WAS ACTIVE INTERNALLY IN SUBVERSION AND THAT ITS DEFEATED SECRETARY GENERAL AJMAL KHATTAK WAS BACKING ANTI-PAKISTAN ACTIVITIES WHILE SITTING IN KABUL."

7. ON FEBRUARY 13, LAWYER FOR NAP LEADER WALI KHAN FILED HABEAS CORPUS PETITION WITH LAHORE HIGH COURT CONTENDING THAT NAP LEADER'S DETENTION WAS MALA FIDE SINCE HE HAD BEEN ARRESTED FEBRUARY 9, WHILE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS WERE ONLY MADE FEBRUARY 12. PROCEEDINGS HAVE BEEN ADJOURNED TO FEBRUARY 25 TO PERMIT THE GOVERNMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO SUBMIT GROUNDS FOR DETENTION.

8. COMMENT: IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER OPPOSITION LEADERS ACTUALLY INTEND TO BOYCOTT NAP CASE BEFORE SUPREME COURT, THUS LEAVING FIELD TO GOVERNMENT BY DEFAULT. SOME CLAIM THEY WERE MISQUOTED (ALTHOUGH VERNACULAR PRESS ACCOUNTS SEEM TO AGREE ON POINT). WHILE ORGANIZED POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT IS ADMITTEDLY WEAK IN NUMBERS -- ESPECIALLY IN ASSEMBLIES -- ITS VOICE APPEALS TO MANY WHO ARE DISSATISFIED WITH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TRENDS IN THE COUNTRY, THROUGH INFLUENTIAL VERNACULARS LIKE NAWA-I-WAQT. AND OPPOSITION COULD YET MAKE MATTERS UNCOMFORTABLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT IN THE COURTS WHICH HAVE MANAGED TO MAINTAIN MUCH OF THEIR TRADITIONAL INTEGRITY AND INDEPENDENCE.

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